

## CONVENTION ADDRESS – 2010

The Right Rev. John L. Rabb

The great author in the Old Testament, *Qoheleth*, speaks of the seasons. In fact, far from being simply a popular song from the 1960s, “for everything there is a season” it is all about God’s mastery and mystery. Seasons are occasions for God’s good work. For *Qoheleth* there was much that could not be fully comprehended, but he believed we are called to live into it all because it is about what God needs us to do and be about to be fully alive in our faith, even the difficult parts. Since we do not read any book of the Bible in isolation, the resignation and even despair we find in Ecclesiastes is well matched by the hope filled words of, say, 3<sup>rd</sup> Isaiah. Here the seasons, the occasions, are about the new vision God is calling to embrace. As we look to the new horizons for the Diocese of Maryland we need to see the seasons that have been and are the foundations upon which we will build for a new vision. So let me speak to the seasons or occasions of ministries. For as we face new horizons let us recall the seasons, the occasions, in which we are living for they give foundation and shape to that which is to come.

The first season has to do with ministry development. At the annual gathering of *Living Stones* – the consortium of American and Canadian dioceses doing mutual or total ministry – each diocese who, like us, is a full partner will present a case study in a cluster of four dioceses. Believe me when I tell you it can be an awesome experience to sit in silence while your ministry is critiqued. My very good friend and one of the best members of the House of Bishops, Tom Ely – Bishop of Vermont – asked a question. He wondered why I said, “The Diocese of Maryland is not primarily a mutual ministry diocese.” He went on to ask that given what we are doing, why we would state who we are not instead of whom we are. He noted to us that we do ministry development that includes mutual ministry, residential seminary in pursuit of the Master of Divinity, Anglican Studies for those being received from other traditions, deacon formation, and ministry for special circumstances and lifelong Christian formation for all ages. Why not, Tom suggested, say with pride this is what we do? Sometimes it takes someone from somewhere else to tell us what we should know about ourselves. I recall at General Convention asking why it took a non-Christian political scientist from Harvard to tell us what we should have learned in Sunday school! However, more to the point is that in the Diocese of Maryland we have been, are, and will continue to be about ministry development. We cannot do the work of our Lord Jesus Christ unless we have the necessary formation.

In terms of Mutual Ministry, we are so pleased that we have a new Western Maryland Missioner, the Rev. Theresa Brion, from the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia. We presently have teams at St. John’s, Frostburg; St. Peter’s, Lonaconing; St. James, Westernport in Allegany County and at all three churches in Garrett County: St. Matthew’s, Oakland; St. John’s, Deer Park and Our Father’s House. While we have had two deaths and dealt with health issues, we are now ready to begin our next generation. We will continue to work with Episcopal Divinity School in the formation. And I am very pleased that Theresa is part of the leadership for *Living Stones* and part of the ministry development collaborative. This work is all about baptismal ministry and strengthening congregations to do the work we are called to do. Far from survival, each of the participating congregations is expanding its ministry. We are excited about the growth of the Latino ministry in Western Maryland. In addition to the congregations in mutual ministry, we are seeking full collaboration with the Latino ministry and in youth ministry as well. We will be working closely with Emmanuel, Cumberland, Holy Cross, Cumberland and St. George’s, Mt. Savage in the larger work of ministry development for the whole region.

This past year I received requests from forty-two churches for assignment of a deacon. This was a challenge given that we had only twenty-six deacons to place. Clearly the need is there. I am pleased to say that this year we doubled the number of persons in the Deacon Formation Program. With the work of our archdeacons, the Rev. Kerry Smith and the Rev. Lauren Welch, we have seen a dramatic increase in both the visibility and the understanding of the diaconate. Why do we need deacons? We do not need them for the servant ministry of Christ, which is the work of the church. We need them to provide leadership, teaching, and training and to symbolize what the church is called to do and to be.

The Diocese of Maryland has taken pride in the number of ordained persons we have under the age of thirty-five and of color. I remain pleased that over the past several years over twenty-five percent of our postulants and candidates have been under the age of thirty-five and/or persons of color. Most important of all, the Commission on Ministry – under the most capable leadership of John Thorpe of the Cathedral of the Incarnation and the Rev. Jenni Ovenstone-Smith of St. John’s, Ellicott City – has focused on the critical question of what the church needs from ordained leadership and, further, has moved from simply responding to those who present themselves to being more proactive. This fall we will begin a discernment process solely for persons in college or who have just completed their college education. To date we know of eight persons who are interested.

Another season of ministry is Christian Formation. At the last General Convention it was my pleasure to be the House of Bishops’ Chairperson for the Committee on Education, which means being co-chair along with the Chairperson of the House of Deputies Committee on Education of one of the cognate committees of General Convention, Education. Our monumental work was to pass, unanimously, *The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation*, which is a framework for each congregation to be about lifelong Christian formation. In addition, I serve on the Commission for Lifelong Christian Formation of The Episcopal Church. One of the great opportunities before us is to build up Christian formation in each of our congregations. We need serious work in growing in our faith, in being equipped for ministry and in being able to face the great issues we face as we live our faith in the world. Much has been done, and our annual conference of last Saturday is a great testimony to this fact. I want to thank our Christian Formation Council, under the able leadership of Loree Penner, for an outstanding job! The energy on Saturday was electric! But I am also very pleased that this is becoming a priority for the diocese.

Two positions I have outside of the diocese affect serious work we are doing here in Maryland and affect what might be called the season of urban life and of health care. The first is that I remain the President of the Episcopal Urban Caucus, and am pleased now to have on our board the Rev. Glenna Reed and the Rev. Ron Miller. We have been about a lot of working in meeting the mission needs in the city. *The Summit on the City* is now an annual event. The intent is to continue to network, worship and build up the ministries for work in the city. We have been about two new ventures. In West Baltimore, the Rev. Glenna Reed assisted by two deacons, the Rev. Jayne Mayrer and the Rev. Marshall Thompson are working as a team serving St. Luke’s, Carey Street and Holy Nativity, Pimlico Road. This is an exciting use of team ministry and shared resources. One challenges, the care of the building at St. Luke’s, is huge, and is being addressed. Most important is that we have the opportunity on Carey Street to make a significant difference, particularly for children, in one of Baltimore’s most challenged neighborhoods. We must not abandon such neighborhoods as Franklin Square, but most of all we must be totally faithful in our Lord’s call to serve those most in need. In East Baltimore, the new shared ministry of the Rev. Monique Ellison and the Rev. Hector Rodriguez serving as co-vicars provide both

an English and a Spanish congregation and worship. Under the leadership of Hector Rodriguez and assisted by Wes Wubbenhorst we have a much expanded Latino ministry. This includes the exchange with the Diocese of Honduras and the Latino priest for Western Maryland.

I am also on the board of National Episcopal Health Ministries. Health care is a matter of Christian faith. So such will be the title and theme for our major health conference set for Saturday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, at the Bishop Claggett Center. We now have a new health initiative at St. George's, Mt. Savage, and the continued ministries of parish nurses and wellness programs in many of our churches. The churches, for example, St. George's, North Carroll and St. James, Lafayette Square hold annual wellness fairs. St. Mary's Outreach Center continues an active partnership with Union Memorial Hospital. This is just a sampling. Our commitment to health ministry and wellness needs to be paramount in all of our churches.

So I have noted ministry development, Christian formation, urban ministry, and health ministries. There is so much happening in the Diocese of Maryland. I cite these four areas not to be exhaustive, but to be symbolic of how much mission and ministry is taking place in this diocese. It is exciting and a joy to be but a part of it all. Some of this is part of the seasons we have been about and some of it speaks to the seasons that are still unfolding before us.

Now it is time for me to be about a new season of ministry. I have informed the Standing Committee and Eugene Sutton that I will, upon the conclusion of this convention, start the necessary canonical action, and to ask the Presiding Bishop to seek the consent of the House of Bishops for my retirement as Bishop Suffragan of Maryland, effective 1 January 2011. It is a bit unnerving that the canonical language reads "for reasons of advanced age." It is true I will turn 66 this year, and by the end of this year will have served longer than any bishop elected or appointed in Maryland since David Leighton. But my real reason is that I am responding to what God is calling me to in a new season of ministry. I will be doing a combination of teaching, continued work in ministry development, preaching in a different venue, my Franciscan studies and writing. Even now I have two manuscripts before a publisher. It is time for me and Sharon to respond to a new call to serve our Lord and Christ's church in a new way, and for me, an exciting way. I have loved serving as Bishop Suffragan in Maryland and will still be with you for a while longer. What I love most of all is what we have done together. I recall a moment in the discernment when I told my designated shepherd, Martha Horton, that I wondered if one can really love a diocese "as" or "the way" we can love a congregation. She told me it was a good question; she did not try to answer it. But it has been answered. I love the Diocese of Maryland, all of you, each congregation and everything we have done. I have felt loved by this diocese, far more than I would have imagined. So my very good friends, it is with love that I say thank you. I will always love you.

+John L. Rabb